

Apple Cider Jelly

There are some recipes that seem to have more in common with magic than plain old everyday cooking. Apples have lots of natural pectin, so one October day I wondered what would happen if I simmered down an entire gallon of good apple cider? The answer: you are left with a gorgeous, amber-colored, natural apple cider jelly. The only catch—this is true *slow* cooking—it can take up to three hours to transform one gallon of cider into about a cup of jelly, but trust me when I say it's well worth the time.

Making apple cider jelly is a great project when you're in the kitchen busy baking cookies or other holiday foods.

Serve the jelly as a condiment with holiday roasts—we particularly like it with roast pork, turkey, chicken, lamb, and beef—or on your morning muffins and toast, with squash dishes and even on top of butter cookies. It's excellent on a sharp cheddar cheese sandwich. Make a few batches and give the cider jelly as a gift.

One gallon unpasteurized apple cider, with no additives

Place the cider in a large, heavy pot and bring to a gentle boil over high heat. Reduce the heat to low and let simmer for about 2 hours. After about 2 hours the cider will begin to thicken and coat the back of a spoon. This is the time to pay attention. *Do not answer the phone—stay focused on the jelly.* Keep cooking over a gentle simmer, on very low heat, for another forty-five minutes or until the jam begins to thicken and the syrupy mixture comes to about 190 degrees on a candy thermometer. My jelly took almost three hours to thicken. Let cool and place in a glass jelly jar. Refrigerate. The jelly will keep for several weeks.

Makes about 1 cup.

Variations:

- For a spicy jelly: place a chile pepper cut in half down the middle into a piece of cheesecloth and tie it up. Place the chile into the cider for the first hour of cooking, and then remove.
- Make a mulled cider jelly: place a cinnamon stick, allspice berries, and three cloves in a piece of cheesecloth and tie it up tightly. Place in the jelly during the first hour of cooking, and then remove.
- For an herbal apple cider jelly: place several leaves of fresh sage, rosemary, and oregano (or any fresh herb) in a piece of cheesecloth and tie up tightly. Place in the cider for the first 1 1/2 hours of cooking time, and then remove.

Recipe from Kathy Gunst's new book, "Notes from a Maine Kitchen." (Down East Books 2011)